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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001187

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [TW](#)

SUBJECT: ANNIVERSARY PROTEST OF MARCH 19 SHOOTING LARGELY SYMBOLIC

REF: A. TAIPEI 00955

[1](#)B. TAIPEI 01076

Classified By: AIT Director Douglas Paal, Reasons: 1.4 (B/D)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Pan-Blue officials have told AIT that the planned March 19 rally to protest the one-year anniversary of the shooting of President Chen Shui-bian and Vice President Annette Lu is primarily to placate KMT Chairman Lien Chan. Though there are widespread doubts among Pan-Blue -- and not a few Pan-Green -- supporters regarding last week's announcement by the Tainan Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of a breakthrough in the shooting investigation, the level of public reaction has been remarkably modest, given the week of angry, boisterous protest demonstrations last Spring. The March 19 shooting investigation has stoked a year of conspiracy theories and deep suspicions about the timing of the CID announcement. Nevertheless Pan-Blue officials maintain that many want to move on and that the rally is being held solely out of respect for KMT Chairman Lien Chan and his continuing bitterness over the election outcome. On the other hand, James Soong, Chairman of the KMT's erstwhile coalition partner, People First Party (PFP), will not attend the rally, and PFP legislators planning to attend say they will do so only to appease constituents who support Lien. News coverage of the investigation and the March 19 rally has been overshadowed by media focus on the PRC Anti-Secession Law and the planned "million-person" protest rally on March 26, which will probably reduce the number of March 19 participants substantially below the projected target of fifty thousand. End summary.

A Rally For An Embittered Lien Chan

[1](#)2. (C) In private, Pan-Blue officials candidly admit to AIT that the rally planned on March 19 to protest the one-year anniversary of the shooting of President Chen and Vice President Lu is being organized on behalf of KMT Chairman Lien Chan and fringe elements of the KMT and PFP. According to KMT spokeswoman Cheng Li-wen, organizers are expecting around 50,000 protesters with Lien, Taipei Mayor Ma Ying-jeou, and Legislative Yuan (LY) Speaker Wang Jin-pyng in attendance. However, KMT Organizational Development Committee Chairman Liao Fung-te privately told AIT that the KMT is organizing the rally just "to comfort Lien Chan." He said that Lien firmly believes the shooting robbed him of the election and, since it is the anniversary of the shooting, out of respect for Lien, the party "has to do something." Liao told AIT that other than that reason, there is no significance to the rally and he is expecting no more than 50,000 protesters.

Doubts Over CID Investigation Breakthrough

[1](#)3. (C) There is widespread doubt among most Pan-Blue and many Pan-Green supporters over the March 19 shooting investigation breakthrough announced two weeks ago by the CID (Ref A). KMT Chairman Lien Chan called the report an insult to the wisdom of the people of Taiwan and said the CID taskforce had left many questions unanswered. The PFP called for CID to continue its investigation, with some PFP lawmakers reporting that almost no one in the LY believed CID's claims and evidence. Even Vice President Lu and Premier Frank Hsieh expressed reservations about the alleged breakthrough. Vice President Lu called on the CID to find more compelling evidence to convince the people, including herself, while Hsieh urged that prosecutors to disclose as many facts as possible for the sake of social and political stability.

[1](#)4. (C) The Taiwan public also is skeptical of the new evidence announced by the Tainan CID. According to a poll conducted by the Blue-leaning China Times, 26 percent of those polled believed the CID's findings while 51 percent did not. The United Daily News also conducted a poll with 57 percent saying the evidence was not strong enough and only 22 percent saying they accept it. A neighbor of deceased suspect Chen Yi-hsiung told AIT that there were many holes in the government's claim that Chen was behind the shooting and

that she did not believe he did it. The neighbor asserted to AIT that the investigators were putting too much emphasis on the observation that Chen quickly left the scene of the shooting. She said that he always walked at a brisk pace. The neighbor also hypothesized that the government is paying the family off to take the fall because the government has moved them out of their home to an undisclosed hotel.

Fueling Conspiracy Theories

15. (C) The CID shooting investigation's unanswered questions are fueling even more conspiracy theories about the shooting. Professor Emile Sheng from Soochow University told AIT that he had heard from his sources that PFP Chairman Soong's reconciliation with President Chen was behind the CID breakthrough, which was announced only days before the one year anniversary of the assassination attempt. Sheng said his sources believed that during Soong's recent meeting with President Chen, Soong asked Chen to order the CID investigation team to announce the investigation breakthrough so Soong could back out of the planned Pan-Blue protests and distance himself from Lien Chan. (Note: PFP Policy Chief Vincent Chang, who accompanied Soong to his meeting with President Chen told AIT that Soong made no such request. End Note) Sheng also said that some in the Pan-Blue camp claim the investigation announcement was timed by the government to distract the public from Beijing's Anti-Secession Law.

But Time to Move On

16. (C) Officials from both camps say despite doubts over the investigation most voters want to move on and do not want continued political deadlock. The PFP's Soong publicly stated that he respected the incredulity of Pan-Blue supporters, but that the PFP would not mobilize supporters to take part in the rally. PFP Policy Chief Vincent Chang told AIT that Soong's attendance would not be constructive for efforts to mend political ties with the Pan-Green, particularly after Soong's recent public reconciliation with President Chen. Chang added that the only reason some PFP legislators would be attending the rally was because some of their constituents still support Lien Chan. Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) Secretary General Lee Yi-yang said the rally would not lead to further hostility between the Pan-Blue and Pan-Green because the people want to move on and that tensions have eased between both sides since last year's election.

Comment: 3/19 Rally and Investigation Overshadowed

17. (C) There is considerable doubt among the Taiwan populace over the Tainan CID's March 19 shooting investigation breakthrough announcement. However, despite questions about the evidence in the investigation, the planned rally is largely symbolic for all except Lien Chan and his most stalwart supporters, who remain deeply embittered over last year's presidential election results. The Pan-Blue's expected 50,000 protesters is a small cry from the rallies of hundreds of thousands of protesters immediately following last year's presidential election. Moreover, the current focus of media and public attention on Beijing's Anti-Secession Law and the planned March 26 "million-person" protest rally has overshadowed the planned March 19 shooting anniversary rally, suggesting that even this more modest expectation may not be realized.

PAAL